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ABSTRACT

This study examined the degree of college student satisfaction with university student services, facilities, and programs and the link of student satisfaction with student retention. In particular the study evaluated factors that account for the variance between groups of students who plan to remain at the university and those who do not. During the fall semester of 1992 an Enrolled Student Survey was administered a random selection of graduates and undergraduates to assess students' satisfaction. Study findings indicated that survey respondents (n=313) were satisfied with most services and facilities. They expressed a high rate of dissatisfaction only with parking and expressed a moderate rate of dissatisfactions with their student government and with their voice in college policies. Results of the multiple regression analysis showed that a significant portion of variance in retention was predicted by three factors: (1) use of the Counseling Center; (2) use of the Career Services Center; and (3) responses on the item addressing "concern for you as an individual." Both these Centers are urged to plan stronger programs and services to facilitate student retention. Data also showed that students who perceive a personal concern for them in the university community are more likely to return to the university. (Contains 15 references.) (JB)

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The Relationship of College Facilities and Services to Student Retention

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Abstract

College student attrition and retention have received increased attention by universities and colleges over the past 15 years. Institutions are evaluating current student retention methods and strategies. A primary component in retaining students is the congruence between the students' characteristics and needs and various aspects of the campus environment. This study was designed to determine the degree of student satisfaction with university student services, facilities, and programs. During the Fall semester of 1992, an Enrolled Student Survey was administered in order to assess students' satisfaction.

At the .05 level of significance, three factors entered the regression equation and accounted for 12.6% of the variance in student retention and were: (a) "Counseling Center," (b) "concern for you as an individual," and (c) "Career Services Center." Frequencies for all item responses are provided in the paper.

The Relationship of College Facilities and Services to Student Retention

College student attrition and retention have received increased attention by universities and colleges over the past 15 years. The recent focus of student attrition has been highlighted because of the decline in the number of high school graduates and the potential multidimensional effect on the institution because of this decrease. Scully (1980) commented on the possible existence of a "demographic depression" over the next two decades that could potentially manifest itself in declines of 5 to 15% in traditionally aged undergraduate enrollments. Although the overall national number of high school graduates is projected to increase from 1994 to 2004, it is expected that 29 states will experience a negative change in the number of high school graduates between 1986 and 2004 (Brasel, 1991). With the number of potential college students on the decline, institutions are evaluating current student retention methods and strategies.

Existing research indicates that the college environment is related to student behavior. It has

been established that environmental characteristics have been related to student self-esteem, mood, and satisfaction (Insel & Moos, 1974). Corazzini and Wilson (1977) showed that students whose needs were not met by the university often responded by changing majors, by seeking assistance at the counseling center, by dropping out, or by expressing dissatisfaction with the university in other ways.

Several studies have shown that a primary component in retaining students is the agreement between the student's characteristics and needs and various aspects of the campus environment (Astin, 1978; Banning & Kaiser, 1974; Moos, 1979). It stands to reason that students who have a high satisfaction with their environment are more likely to remain enrolled in the institution. Astin (1978) has noted the importance of student involvement in college activities (e.g., student organizations, fraternities/sororities, athletics) other than academic studies.

Dunphy, Miller, Woodruff, and Nelson (1987) reviewed several effective programs that targeted students in the educational involvement process.

College seminars, mentoring, outreach programs and extended orientation courses were all found to be successful with the general goal of supporting students in their academic and social development. It is apparent that student satisfaction research should focus on the college environment and the interactions that the student has with this environment. One method of appraising the quality of student services, facilities and programs is to assess student awareness, usage, and satisfaction by frequently administering student surveys. Carney and Barak (1976) recommended that yearly surveys of students' needs, usage, and satisfaction with student services be conducted to examine changes in student perceptions over time. Hallenbeck (1978) emphasized the significance of recognizing those variables of the college that are satisfying and those that are not when formulating an information base from which to make decisions in the area of student affairs and institutional directions. Additionally, (Earwood-Smith and Colbert, 1989) recognized the importance of using campus-specific instruments to enhance the accuracy of assessing the

students' perceptions with the college environment, thereby strengthening the probability of implementing successful retention programs.

The present study was conducted after a student affairs research council at a major university in the Southeast conducted an Enrolled Student Survey pilot study (RCSDSA, 1990). The pilot study identified the characteristics and variables that are satisfying to university students. The enrolled students reported satisfaction with the following: (a) Counseling Center, (b) Student Health Center, (c) Student Union, (d) financial aid, (e) food services, (f) recreational facilities, (g) residence halls, (h) registration procedures, (i) library, (j) academic advising, (k) personal safety, (l) fee payment procedure, (m) student voice in college policies, and (n) student government. Variables that students reported as being dissatisfied with were: (a) day care services, (b) campus police, and (c) campus parking.

Careful attention must be given to the evaluation of student satisfaction with the college environment to plan and implement student service programs and to

determine the effectiveness of the existing services. By assessing areas of student satisfaction, it is possible to implement and redesign programs and services for the student.

Purpose and Objectives

This study was designed to determine the degree of satisfaction with student services, facilities and programs at a major university in the Southeast. The purpose of this study was to identify factors that account for the variance between groups of students who plan to remain at the university and those who do not, as reported by students on the Enrolled Student Survey, administered by a student affairs research council.

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe the sample of students who completed the Enrolled Student Survey according to gender, race, classification, and other demographic data.

2. Report the frequencies of the responses on the Enrolled Student Survey as to which items the subjects were satisfied with, dissatisfied with, or not aware of.

3. Determine which Enrolled Student Survey items account for a statistically significant amount of variance between students who plan to stay and students who plan to leave.

Methodology

During the Fall semester of 1992, the Student Affairs Research Council and Office of Institutional Research administered the Enrolled Student Survey to assess student satisfaction with University services, programs, and facilities. At the end of the Fall 1992 semester, surveys were mailed to a random sample of 750 undergraduate and graduate students. Students who were graduating in December 1992 were excluded from the sample because graduating students' perceptions are assessed by the university separately.

The sample was stratified according to the percentage of students enrolled in each classification (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate). A comparison of the students sampled with the university population across parameters of gender, age, race, and marital status indicated that the mailed sample was representative of the population. A total of 313

surveys was returned, for a return rate of 42%. Comparisons of data from the returned surveys on the variables of gender, age, race, marital status, and classification showed that the returned sample represented the enrolled student body on all variables except classification. Despite the fact that the original sample was stratified according to classification, in the distribution of classifications among returned surveys, freshmen were underrepresented.

The criterion variables used for the third research objective were all responses to the college characteristics and services portion of the survey that included 43 survey items in addition to one item which asks the students whether or not they would recommend the institution to others. The outcome variable was an item from the demographic portion of the instrument that asked the student to "describe your plans for the coming year." All statistical tests were performed at the .05 level of significance.

Instrumentation

The Enrolled Student Survey was developed by the Student Affairs Research Council to collect specific

information concerning satisfaction with the college facilities, programs and services. Items for the Enrolled Student Survey were created through a review of the student development literature, through interviews with student affairs professionals, and from an analysis of former environmental assessment surveys.

The instrument, a 61-item questionnaire, consisted of two separate sections. Section One included 17 multiple choice, or yes/no questions reporting demographic information (gender, age, ethnic identification, etc.) and other background information (living situation, current work status, Greek participation, etc.).

Section Two consisted of 43 items that were divided into three parts: (a) matriculation, (b) student services and programs, and (c) university facilities, faculty, and staff. Instructions for this section asked respondents to indicate their degree of usage and satisfaction. Students responded to the 43 questions by checking "very dissatisfied," "somewhat dissatisfied," "not aware/never used," "somewhat satisfied," or "very satisfied" for each question. The

last question in this section asked the respondents if they would recommend MSU to a friend, and to indicate this by checking "yes" or "no."

Content validity was determined by a panel of student affairs experts from the Student Affairs Research Council. Once the instruments were collected, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Coefficient (alpha = .88).

Analysis

To address the first research objective, frequency data were computed for each of the demographic questions. Three hundred thirteen students completed and returned usable surveys. Responses to the demographic questions are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The second research objective was to report the frequencies of the satisfaction portion of the survey instrument. This section sought to determine if the students were aware of, not aware, and (if aware) whether they were satisfied with the college

characteristics and services. Table 2 displays the frequencies of the responses to items concerning university matriculation.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 3 shows the frequencies of the responses to university student services and programs.

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 4 displays the frequencies of the responses to items concerning university facilities, faculty, and staff.

Insert Table 4 about here

The college characteristics and services were analyzed with frequencies and percentages. Each item was then classified using the parameters utilized by the RCSDSA (1990) pilot study. Responses of "not aware/never used" were not included in the item

classification since they were not included in the pilot study. Those items in which 80% or more of the students chose either "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" were classified as items with a high rate of satisfaction. Items in which 50% to 79% of the students chose either "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" were classified as items with a moderate rate of satisfaction. Those items in which 80% or more of the students chose either "somewhat dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" were classified as items with a high rate of dissatisfaction. Items in which 50% to 79% of the students chose either "somewhat dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" were classified as items with a moderate rate of dissatisfaction.

Students reported a high rate of satisfaction with the following characteristics and services: (a) preregistration procedures, (b) final registration procedures, (c) fee payment procedures, (d) availability of instructors out of class, (e) size of classes, (f) the Counseling Center, (g) the Health Center, (h) the Student Union, (i) the admissions process, (j) the orientation program, (k) religious

activities and programs, (l) student conduct rules, (m) recreational services/programs and athletic facilities, (n) the general condition of classroom buildings, (o) the general condition of campus grounds, and (p) the attitude of faculty toward students. The students reported a moderate rate of satisfaction for: (a) processing of financial aid, (b) library resources, (c) library services and personnel, (d) availability of academic advisor, (e) quality of information provided by the advisor, (f) the Career Services Center, (g) Dining Services, (h) Bookstore services, (i) the financial aid office, (j) campus police, (k) personal safety and security on campus, (l) student job services, (m) cultural programs, (n) racial harmony, (o) concern for students as an individual, (p) opportunity for involvement in campus activities, (q) campus media, (r) the Computing Center, (s) microcomputer/PC access and support, (t) residence hall facilities, (u) recreational and intramural facilities, (v) campus bookstore facilities, (w) day care services, and (x) attitude of non-teaching staff toward students.

Students reported a high rate of dissatisfaction only with parking facilities. The students reported a moderate rate of dissatisfaction for: (a) student government, and (b) student voice in college policies.

The third research objective sought to determine which of the 44 college programs, facilities, and service factors accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance between the students who plan to leave (n = 45) from students who plan to stay (n = 189). At the .05 level, three factors entered the stepwise multiple regression equation and accounted for 12.6% of the variance between students retained and students who planned to leave.

Insert Table 5 about here

Further analysis of the variables entered into the regression equation revealed that the criterion variable "Counseling Center" entered into the regression equation first, and accounted for 5.2% of the variance between students retained and not retained. While, overall, most students had not used

the Counseling Center, those who had used it expressed satisfaction. The positive beta (.181) on this item indicated that students who planned to leave the university tended to have used the Counseling Center more than their peers and they were satisfied with its services.

"Concern for you as an individual" was the second criterion variable that entered into the regression equation and differentiated the students retained or not retained by accounting for an additional 4.5% of the variance. Overall, students were generally satisfied with this item. A negative beta (-.238) indicated that students who were staying at the university were more satisfied with the university's concern for them as individuals than were the students who plan to leave the university.

"Career Services Center" was the final criterion variable that entered into the regression equation and differentiated the students retained or not retained by accounting for an additional 2.8% of the variance. As with the Counseling Center (above), most students have not used the Career Services Center, but those who have

used it indicated satisfaction with its services. A positive beta (.177) on this item indicates that students who were leaving the university were more likely than their peers to have used the Career Services Center, and they were satisfied with its services.

Discussion

Results of this study indicate that students enrolled are satisfied with most services and facilities at the university. They expressed a high rate of dissatisfaction only with parking and expressed a moderate rate of dissatisfaction with their student government and with their voice in college policies. Despite these complaints, most students judged campus services to be satisfactory.

Results of the multiple regression analysis showed that a significant portion of variance in retention can be predicted by three factors. The increased use of the Counseling Center by students leaving the university is a positive sign, especially when coupled with the satisfaction rating for the Counseling Center from these students. Apparently, students who

experience problems sufficient to cause them to leave the university are receiving appropriate assistance from the Counseling Center. Mayes and McConatha (1982) suggested that for entering students, personal issues were of greater concern than career matters. This knowledge offers an opportunity for university officials to intervene with innovative programs before problems become too burdensome for the student.

The responses of students concerning the Career Services Center are similarly encouraging. Apparently, students are using the Career Services Center when they anticipate leaving the university, and they are satisfied with its services as well. Weissberg, Berentsen, Cote', Cravey and Heath (1982) found that students expressed a very strong need for career development. Universities could implement stronger vocational-guidance approaches to help facilitate student retention.

The responses of students on "concern for you as an individual" offer opportunities for response from the university. Students who perceive a personal concern for them in the university community are more

likely to plan to return to the university than those who do not feel that concern. This concern can be located in any part of the campus community: faculty, administration, student services, student organizations, etc. Students who feel connected through someone's personal concern for them are likely to remain enrolled.

The results indicated a relatively low freshmen response rate. Student retention studies consistently show that the highest attrition occurs around the freshman year (Dunphy et al., 1987). Since freshmen will potentially be using university services and facilities more during their academic careers, and they have unique characteristics that place them in a high risk dropout group, future studies should include methods to insure a higher response rate from freshmen than this survey achieved.

Future studies should also target different populations. Specific services and facilities may not be appropriate for certain students classified by race/ ethnicity, gender, grade classifications, Greek

membership, housing status, and other classifications (Pennington, Zvonkovich, & Wilson, 1989).

Overall, students found college to be somewhat more difficult than expected. University services and facilities could help students manage their time and coursework responsibilities in order to alleviate this pressure. Services and facilities could encourage student participation in some college activity other than academic studies (Astin, 1978). A majority of the students live off campus. Perhaps the university should consider services and facilities which cater to students who live off campus. This supports previous research about student housing (Hallenbeck, 1978; Pennington et al., 1989).

Two items the students expressed dissatisfaction with were student government and a voice in college policies. University officials should consider ways to allow more student involvement with the system. This is consistent with Astin (1978) who stressed the importance of student involvement as it relates to student retention.

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Table 1

Demographic Information

Variable	n	Percent
Gender		
Male	171	54.6
Female	139	44.4
No Response (NR)	3	1.0
Racial/Ethnic Identification		
Caucasian-American	256	81.8
African-American	34	10.9
International	17	5.4
Other	4	1.3
NR	2	0.6
Classification		
Freshman	11	3.5
Sophomore	55	17.6
Junior	64	20.4
Senior	122	39.0
Graduate/Veterinarian	59	18.8
NR	2	0.6
Participation in Greek Rush		
Yes	72	23.0
No	236	75.4
NR	5	1.6

Table 1 (Continued)

Variable	n	Percent
How Academically Difficult is the University Compared to Your Expectations?		
Much More Difficult	17	5.4
A Bit More Difficult	80	25.6
As Expected	185	59.1
A Bit Less Difficult	23	7.3
Much Less Difficult	4	1.3
NR	4	1.3
Housing Accommodations		
University Residence Hall	81	25.9
Parent/Relative	23	7.3
Off Campus Room, Apt, Home	191	61.0
University Married Housing	9	2.9
NR	9	2.9
Marital Status		
Single	246	78.6
Married	59	18.8
Divorced	7	2.2
No Response (NR)	1	0.3

Table 2

Frequencies of Responses on the Matriculation Section of the Enrolled Student Survey

	Frequencies of Responses[a]				
	1	2	3	4	5
Pre-registration procedures	4	22	6	141	134
Final registration procedures	6	19	25	142	113
Fee-payment procedures	29	24	5	134	110
Processing of financial aid	35	45	119	68	36
Library resources	66	74	12	113	38

Note. Maximum N = 313.

[a]Responses: 1 = "Very Dissatisfied"

2 = "Somewhat Dissatisfied"

3 = "Not Aware/Never Used"

4 = "Somewhat Satisfied"

5 = "Very Satisfied."

Table 2 (Continued)

	Frequencies of Responses[a]				
	1	2	3	4	5
Library services and personnel	41	64	14	135	51
Availability of instructors out of class	10	39	12	157	89
Size of classes	10	35	2	153	103
Availability of academic advisor	26	55	7	118	101
Quality of information provided by your advisor	39	53	11	117	85

Note. Maximum N = 313.

[a]Responses: 1 = "Very Dissatisfied"

2 = "Somewhat Dissatisfied"

3 = "Not Aware/Never Used"

4 = "Somewhat Satisfied"

5 = "Very Satisfied."

Table 3

Frequencies of Responses on the Student Services and Programs Section of the Enrolled Student Survey

	Frequencies of Responses[a]				
	1	2	3	4	5
Counseling Center	2	6	252	20	22
Career Services Center	8	12	229	34	19
Dining Services	7	39	82	134	41
Bookstore Services	24	42	11	165	65
Financial Aid Office	30	44	130	67	31
Health Center	5	23	65	106	101
Student Union	7	20	42	158	76
Campus Police	58	59	47	103	34

Note. Maximum N = 313.

[a]Responses: 1 = "Very Dissatisfied"

2 = "Somewhat Dissatisfied"

3 = "Not Aware/Never Used"

4 = "Somewhat Satisfied"

5 = "Very Satisfied."

Table 3 (Continued)

	Frequencies of Responses[a]				
	1	2	3	4	5
Admissions process	9	17	15	168	97
Personal safety and security on campus	24	46	22	149	62
Student Job Services	15	17	227	31	14
Cultural programs	7	19	227	35	15
Orientation program	6	21	108	88	82
Student government	37	57	136	57	16
Religious activities and programs	4	9	172	78	42
Student conduct rules	8	23	96	127	50

Note. Maximum N = 313.

[a]Responses: 1 = "Very Dissatisfied"

2 = "Somewhat Dissatisfied"

3 = "Not Aware/Never Used"

4 = "Somewhat Satisfied"

5 = "Very Satisfied."

Table 3 (Continued)

	Frequencies of Responses[a]				
	1	2	3	4	5
Student voice in college policies	60	70	81	83	8
Racial harmony	42	70	37	122	33
Concern for you as an individual	31	66	19	149	39
Opportunity for involvement in campus activities	16	43	58	126	58
Campus media	29	52	53	134	34
Computing Center	17	25	118	95	45
Microcomputer/PC access and support	22	39	114	90	39

Note. Maximum N = 313.

[a]Responses: 1 = "Very Dissatisfied"

2 = "Somewhat Dissatisfied"

3 = "Not Aware/Never Used"

4 = "Somewhat Satisfied"

5 = "Very Satisfied."

Table 4

Frequencies of Responses on the University Facilities, Faculty and Staff Section of the Enrolled Student Survey

	Frequencies of Responses[a]				
	1	2	3	4	5
Residence hall facilities	20	29	117	95	43
Recreational and intramural facilities	16	35	90	117	45
Recreational services/ programs, athletic facilities	15	27	91	116	54
Campus Bookstore facilities	22	43	10	164	65
Parking facilities	175	74	10	38	8

Note. Maximum N = 313.

[a]Responses: 1 = "Very Dissatisfied"

2 = "Somewhat Dissatisfied"

3 = "Not Aware/Never Used"

4 = "Somewhat Satisfied"

5 = "Very Satisfied."

Table 4 (Continued)

	Frequencies of Responses[a]				
	1	2	3	4	5
Day care services	4	3	284	5	6
General condition of classroom buildings	11	44	3	191	54
General condition of campus grounds	2	12	4	135	148
Attitude of non-teaching staff toward students	27	49	28	142	55
Attitude of faculty toward students	9	45	3	158	88

Note. Maximum N = 313.

[a]Responses: 1 = "Very Dissatisfied"

2 = "Somewhat Dissatisfied"

3 = "Not Aware/Never Used"

4 = "Somewhat Satisfied"

5 = "Very Satisfied."

Table 5

Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of Items Concerning Student Retention Status

Item	Beta	T	Sig. of T
Counseling Center	.181	2.409*	.017
Concern for you as an individual	-.238	-3.253*	.001
Career Services Center	.177	2.330*	.021

*$F(3, 167) = 8.021$ Multiple R = .355

*$p < .05$